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ON PAGE 8AUSA TODAY  
7 July 1983

## The Issue: KLAUS BARBIE

Each day, USA TODAY explores and debates a major news issue. Today's page includes our opinion that instead of protecting Barbie, the Army should have brought the Nazi war criminal to justice, other views from California, Nevada and Virginia, and voices from across the USA.

# Justice is near, no thanks to U.S.

The village of Lyon, France, is haunted by the memory of a Nazi butcher.

"He beat me with his fists. He hit me with riding crops and truncheons. Luckily, I fainted. He kicked me awake."

That's one man's nightmare of The Butcher, also known as Gestapo chief Klaus Barbie. Others still mourn the 4,000 Jews and anti-Nazis Barbie is accused of executing, and the 7,591 Jews he sent to Nazi death camps.

It shouldn't be surprising then that 40 years later, Lyon still yearns for vengeance. But The Butcher has yet to answer for his crimes.

The reason he hasn't should be very painful to Americans. In 1951, Barbie was secretly smuggled out of Germany by U.S. intelligence agents to safety in South America.

Reportedly, hundreds of other Nazis also evaded justice through this American conduit. This has raised troubling questions about the moral judgment used by U.S. authorities in those hectic, confusing days in Europe when one war ended, and the Cold War began.

A former U.S. officer told USA TODAY about that chaos: "We were confronted with the mass relocation of millions of people. We were in a sea of different languages — in a cultural turmoil. Everybody was spying against everybody else, so it isn't surprising that we reached out to anybody who could help."

Many of those "anybodies" were former Nazi SS officers and German policemen. Especially valuable were Germans with information about the Communist Party in Europe, data the Allies could use against their former friend and new enemy, the Soviet Union.

Barbie went to work for U.S. intelligence in April of 1947. It was the same year he was tried in absentia for the crimes in Lyon and sentenced to death.

It may well be true that the Americans didn't know at first about Barbie's past. But an American officer who later ordered him arrested was opposed by U.S. intelligence. Once, the Americans even hid Barbie from French authorities. Certainly, by 1951, his background was an open book.

The reconstruction of Europe, physically and spiritually, was a herculean task, and it's easy to look back from today's perspective and criticize actions taken then.

But simple decency hasn't changed. It wasn't right in 1947 for U.S. agents to protect Barbie from his crimes. It wasn't right in 1951 for them to sneak him to safety. It wasn't right in 1954 for U.S. officials to remain silent about Barbie after he was tried and sentenced a second time.

Last January, The Butcher was arrested in Bolivia and was returned to Lyon, where he faces a third trial. Justice will at last be served, but sadly, with no thanks to America.